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INFO RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 3554
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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 6524
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4695
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2622
RUEHN/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4657
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3763
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8963
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6304
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0872
RHHMUNS/COMSOC PAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0908
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3189
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AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN)
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (ACONVER, RTHAYER, RKERR)
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER)
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/AFDA MROGERS AND POL (ESEN)
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USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)
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PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2017

TAGS: PREL AORC PGOV CE

SUBJECT: CO-CHAIR MEETING WITH UN SPECIAL ENVOY TO SRI LANKA

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Co-Chair Ambassadors briefed UN Special Envoy Tamrat Samuel on the short- and longer-term issues he should focus on during his February 5-8 visit. Short term issues include the need for both sides to do much more to protect civilians in the conflict zone, and provide them food and medicine since fighting is likely to continue for at least several weeks. Longer term, the international community must ensure IDPs are treated according to international standards once they are transferred from the north. Already there are disturbing unconfirmed reports that civilians from the north have disappeared during the transfer from the hospital in Vavuniya to the camps in Vavuniya. The other longer-term issue is the need for an inclusive dialogue on the elements of a political settlement so that lasting peace can be achieved. Without that, the LTTE might well be able to carry on a guerrilla insurgency with the support of the Diaspora and the LTTE's many illegal and legal businesses around the world. The Norwegian Ambassador urged Samuel to ask Basil Rajapaksa whether he would be prepared to talk very quietly to the LTTE about modalities for amnesty and surrender. Asked for his advice on prospects for Security Council action on Sri Lanka, Samuel noted Russian objections to a proposed humanitarian briefing and suggested member states seek Human Rights Council consideration of international humanitarian law violations by both sides. Embassy Colombo recommends Department pursue either Security Council and/or Human Rights Council consideration of the situation in northern Sri Lanka to expose significant IHL

violations by both sides. End Summary.

UNSYG Concerned

¶2. (C) Samuel told the Co-Chairs he is in Sri Lanka at the request of the UN Secretary General (UNSG) who is concerned for the welfare of civilians trapped in the conflict zone and wants to know what the UN can do to help avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. He said the SG also asked him to look into how the UN can position itself on long-term issues such as resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and a political solution to address underlying grievances. He indicated that the SG, who is now in Delhi, hopes to speak to President Rajapaksa by phone in coming days. Samuel said he planned to meet GSL and others in Delhi during his February 5-8 visit.

Co-Chairs Note Short- and Long-Term Challenges

¶3. (C) Ambassador opened by noting that one of the problems the UN and diplomats on the ground confront are sharply contrasting styles of dealing with the international community. Defense Secretary Rajapaksa, reflecting nationalist Sinhalese sentiment, does not believe the international community should play much, if any, role in Sri Lanka and he consistently shows little concern for international norms and standards. On the other hand, the President's other brother and Senior Political Advisor Basil

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Rajapaksa, as well as individuals such as the Foreign Minister continue to work constructively with the international community.

Protect Civilians

¶4. (C) Ambassador suggested Samuel focus on both short-term and longer-term issues. There are two short-term priorities. First, both sides must do much more to protect the welfare of civilians in the conflict zone. The LTTE had refused to allow civilians to leave because the LTTE needs the civilians as human shields, as a pool for forced conscription, and as a means to try to persuade the international community to force a cease-fire upon the government, since that is the LTTE's only hope. On the Government side, the Defense Secretary had openly said the Government cannot be responsible for the safety of any civilian or medical facility outside its unilaterally declared safe zone, which both sides had repeatedly shelled. The second short-term priority is the need for humanitarian access to provide the IDPs food and medicine. The Ambassador noted reports that food is running out in the so-called safe zone, forcing IDPs to leave, and exposing them to shelling from the GSL. Since the fighting is likely to go on for several weeks, the UN and international community must find ways to get food either into the no-fire zone, including possibly through air drops if LTTE security assurances cannot be obtained, or we must persuade the government to create a new no-fire zone, perhaps along the coast, where fighting has been less intense. UN Representative Buhne commented that he had already raised the possibility of a new no-fire zone along the coast, without success.

Treat IDPs According to International Standards

¶5. (C) Ambassador said longer-term issues include the need to ensure the IDPs are treated according to international standards once they are transferred from the north. Once the fighting ends, all IDPs would be transferred to transit camps in Vavuniya for registration, before being moved to longer-term "Relief Villages." Ambassador noted disturbing unconfirmed reports that civilians from the north had

disappeared during the transfer from the hospital in Vavuniya to the camps in Vavuniya, while several young women were found in the hospital morgue shot between the eyes. Such reports underline the need for international monitoring of the registration and transfer process. Since Vavuniya has the largest number of paramilitary groups operating anywhere in Sri Lanka, it is very important to ensure a continuous UNHCR or other UN presence in the camps to ensure the safety of IDPs in the camps. Finally, there are many questions about GSL plans to keep IDPs in "Relief Villages" for two to three years. The Co-Chairs had noted the need for resettlement as soon as demining is completed. Much demining already had been done in Mannar, so IDPs could probably begin to be resettled there in a matter of months, while resettlement to other areas should proceed as soon as demining is done. Samuel agreed to see if a visit would be possible.

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Political Solution

¶6. (C) The Ambassador added that the other longer-term issue is the need for an inclusive dialogue on the elements of a political settlement so that lasting peace can be achieved, as the Co-Chairs had indicated. The President had missed a major opportunity on February 4 to reach out to the Tamil people in his independence day speech and reassure them they will enjoy equal rights, respect and dignity within a united Sri Lanka. Indeed there are many concerns the GSL may water down its already vague political plans once the Sri Lankan military occupies the North. Without a credible political settlement, the LTTE might well be able to carry on a guerrilla insurgency with the support of the Diaspora and the LTTE's many illegal and legal businesses around the world. The Japanese Ambassador said Japan shares US concerns that reinvigorated Sinhalese chauvinism could diminish prospects for a credible political settlement.

¶7. (C) Norwegian Ambassador Hattrem commented that it is increasingly difficult for Norway and the UN to communicate with the LTTE. He noted Norway had not been able to communicate with the LTTE for several days until one conversation this morning on a new line from an undisclosed location. Buhne added that the UN also had one contact with a liaison officer earlier in the day after a several day period without any contact. Hattrem added that the LTTE had thus far refrained from publishing photos of the significant humanitarian casualties, perhaps out of concern that the Tamil Diaspora would conclude that the LTTE has lost control and therefore should not be given more money.

LTTE-GSL Talks?

¶6. (C) Samuel asked whether it would be possible to arrange contacts between the LTTE and GSL leadership. He also asked what, given the GSL opposition to any cease-fire, the UN and international community could advocate to protect civilians. Japanese Ambassador responded that the LTTE leadership would likely leave the Vanni once their position becomes untenable so they can lead the LTTE from outside the country. The best option therefore was to contact LTTE leaders outside the country. Hattrem agreed that the LTTE leadership would try to escape, but he said there is no indication of any cracks in their will or unity thus far. Hattrem nonetheless urged Samuel to ask Basil Rajapaksa whether he would be prepared to talk very quietly to the LTTE about modalities for amnesty and surrender, since the GSL would refuse talks about any other issues. He also urged that the Secretary General focus first and foremost on the safety of the civilians and the need for both sides to respect international humanitarian law.

Samuel Suggests Member States Seek

Human Rights Council Action

¶7. (C) Ambassador asked Samuel for his assessment of the

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scope for any kind of action by the Security Council since the Government is sensitive to its international reputation. Samuel responded that it is always difficult to find entry points onto the Security Council agenda. Informal consultations had already taken place to request the SYG to provide a briefing on the humanitarian situation, but Russia had objected since Sri Lanka is not on the Council agenda. Samuel recommended that the Human Rights Council would be a more appropriate venue to raise concerns about violations of international humanitarian law. Embassy Colombo recommends Department pursue either Security Council and/or Human Rights Council consideration of the situation in northern Sri Lanka to expose significant IHL violations by both sides. Embassy would be pleased to provide background information on such violations.

Blake